

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

P.O. Box 419064, Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-9064



June 21, 2001

CSSIN LETTER NO. 01-18

TO: ALL IV-D DIRECTORS
ALL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS
ALL COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS
ALL BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Reason for this Transmittal

- ☐ State Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order or Settlement Change
- ☐ Clarification requested by One or More Counties
- ☒ Initiated by DCSS

SUBJECT: OMBUDSPERSON RESPONSIBILITIES

Background

CSS Letter No. 00-07, dated November 7, 2000, required each county to implement an Ombudsperson Program. The letter also provided information on the funding allocations and parameters for expenditures of the funds for the Local Customer Service Initiatives. The Ombudsperson Program is one of three required components of the Customer Service Initiative. In keeping with the Department of Child Support Services' (DCSS) goal to provide excellent customer service throughout California, DCSS is establishing, in regulation, the operating requirements for the Ombudsperson Program.

Purpose

The purpose of this letter is to provide Local Child Support Agencies (LCSA) with a uniform definition of the Ombudsperson and their role in the California child support program. In an effort to meet the legislative goal to serve parents and children in a uniform and consistent manner, the following definition and role of the Ombudsperson is provided.

"The Ombudsperson, assists custodial parties and non-custodial parents in navigating through the local complaint resolution and state hearing process. The Ombudsperson Program shall provide, as appropriate, assistance to custodial parties and non-custodial parents, employers and the public on inquires regarding the child support program, local complaint resolution process and State Hearing process."



The child support Ombudsperson reports to the LCSA Director and functions independently from other child support processes or responsibilities. Every effort must be made to ensure that customers receive equitable and uniform service.

Role

The Ombudsperson Program goal is to facilitate the resolution of complaints at the earliest possible time. The Ombudsperson Program is distinct from the local complaint process and compliments and supports other administrative procedures available to customers. Customers should be encouraged to first seek assistance from the LCSA caseworker. If the customer feels that his or her issue has not been resolved, the customer should be informed of the availability of the complaint resolution process and the Ombudsperson Program.

Ombudsperson responsibilities:

- Collect and evaluate the facts regarding a complaint. They determine if there is an error, or inappropriate action by the LCSA, or no basis to the complaint.
- Make recommendations and seek resolution of customer concerns to improve the administration of the child support program.
- Navigate custodial parties and non-custodial parents through the local complaint resolution process to address issues that relate to: allegations of inequitable treatment, abuse of power, abuse of discretion, discourteous behavior or incivility, inappropriate application of law or policy, inefficiency, or decisions unsupported by fact.
- Issue an opinion or recommendation on a complaint that results in a review with findings. The Ombudsperson will consult with the LCSA Director and prepare a preliminary report. The Ombudsperson will also provide a final report to the complainant.
- Explain state hearing process and assist customers with special needs and completing documents needed to prepare and file for a state hearing.
- Ombudsperson is designated as the State Hearing Coordinator for the purpose of managing the hearing schedule, securing the hearing site, contacting and acting as the contact person for the complainant, and being the liaison with DCSS and Department of Social Services, State Hearing Office.
- Disseminate information to the public regarding the complaint resolution and state hearing process and other child support services.

- Evaluate the satisfaction of those customers who have received services from the LCSA.
- Report statistical information to DCSS for the purpose of evaluating and continually enhancing the Ombudsperson Program.

What an Ombudsperson **cannot** do:

- The Ombudsperson is not authorized to: change or set aside a law, policy, or administrative decision, make binding decisions or determine rights, or conduct an investigation that substitutes for administrative or judicial proceedings.
- The Ombudsperson shall not provide legal advice to the complainant.
- The Ombudsperson shall not act as the authorized representative for the complainant or the LCSA at a State Hearing.

If a customer has gone through the complaint resolution process and is not satisfied with the outcome, the Ombudsperson can assist with a review of the complaint. The Ombudsperson will also provide the customer with informational materials related to the Ombudsperson program, the local complaint resolution process, the state hearing process, and/or other child support related information.

Please contact Francine Woods, Chief of the Customer and Community Services Branch, at (916) 464-5337 or by email at francine.woods@dcss.ca.gov, if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

CURTIS HOWARD
Assistant Deputy Director
Child Support Services Division